INTERIOR DESIGN IDEAS AND TIPS

Guide to Decorate Your Dream Home

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DEDICATION

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How to Pick the Right Kitchen Countertop Material

Choosing a countertop surface material that suits your lifestyle is the first step to a functional kitchen. Your counters are, after all, where cooking actually happens. We could also argue that your counters are the backdrop and the main event in any kitchen: They take up a lot of visual real estate. And the materials and options you choose, whether indestructible composite slabs or handmade tiles, are for utility as much as for style.

That said, choosing the right countertop can be tricky. First, there are so many options: How do I know what marble I want? And what's the difference between quartz and quartzite? Come to think of it, what exactly is quartzite anyway? Between natural, engineered, and man-made materials and the color options with each, there's a lot to learn.

Ahead, you'll find everything you need to know about countertops. But before you invest or fall in love with any one thing, here's a checklist of things to keep in mind, according to Elizabeth Margles, VP of marketing at Ceasarstone, regardless of which material you use:

- Color and design (the style statement you want to make)
- Size and shape of material (thickness, length, and edge style of the slab)
- Integration with backsplash (if the materials will match)
- A kitchen island (whether or not you want one, and matching it with the counters)
- Durability and ease of maintenance (think about how you'll use the space)
- Total cost of ownership (not only initially, but also future cost for maintenance).

And with that in mind, read on to see how to make the best decisions for your space and budget.

LAMINATE

This nonporous acrylic comes in endless looks, so it's ideal for those who want to go wild with colors and patterns, whether that's a monochromatic statement or a playful design schemes. "It can shape itself into any design concept," says Gerri Chmiel of Formica. New technology has made it tougher, but laminate is still a budget option. "It's a great choice for someone on a budget," says Jean Stoffer. The

downsides? It doesn't hold up to heat as well as other options (so don't put a hot pan directly on it!) and it may start to chip or peel over time.

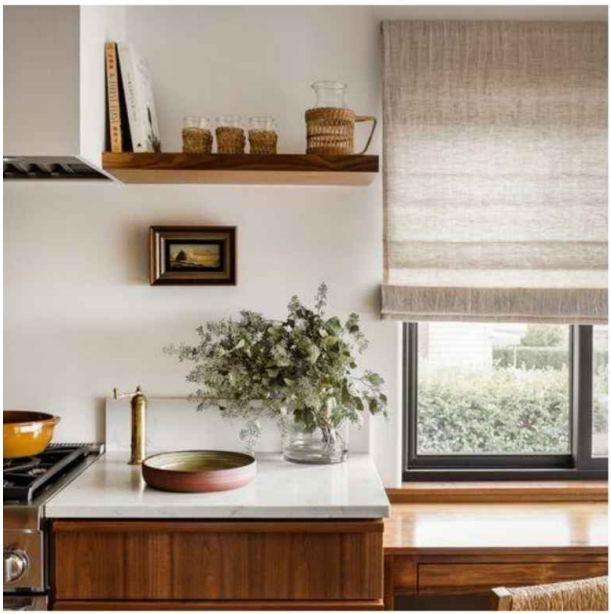
TILES

While tiles are obviously a great backsplash option, they can actually work nicely for countertops, too. Tile countertops are great if you're after a retro look and want something more affordable. The downside is that they often require re-grouting to stay clean. White is the most obvious choice for grout, but "there's an entire grout spectrum out there," says Jake Rodehuth- Harrison of ETC.etera. That said, tile is more heat-resistant, so it'll stand up to hot pans and plates better. Take your pick.

SOLID SURFACE

"Solid surface is an artificial stone, mostly a mixture of natural materials (like stone) and an acrylic bonding agent," interior designer Dries Otten explains. Unlike natural stone that patinas over time, solid surface "will turn old and worn out," he says—but it's still very durable. And resistant to most household cleaning supplies! Plus, it's one of the least expensive countertop options.

QUARTZ



Best for the low-fuss cook, quartz requires no sealing or polishing and has double the impact resistance of natural stone, but it's still a bit sensitive to heat, so hot cookware shouldn't be set directly on it. Quartz countertops are created by mixing quartz particles with resin and polymers to create an extremely durable surface that looks like natural stone. This blend of natural stone and synthetic resins is more resistant to household cleaning supplies and chemicals than natural stone options (so you can keep surfaces looking pristine at all times). Some high-quality quartz materials can be just as costly as natural ones. House Beautiful editorial director Jo Saltz opted for

Caesarstone quartz in her kitchen to mimic the look of marble but stand up to wear and tear.

TERRAZZO

Terrazzo is a composite material made of up chips of marble, quartz, granite, glass, and others, that are then poured into a chemical resin cast. It was super popular in the 80s and saw a resurgence in demand in 2017, proving to be an unexpectedly timeless trend. It's great as a continuous material stretching from countertops to the floor. Terrazzo also come in tiles, some bigger than others.

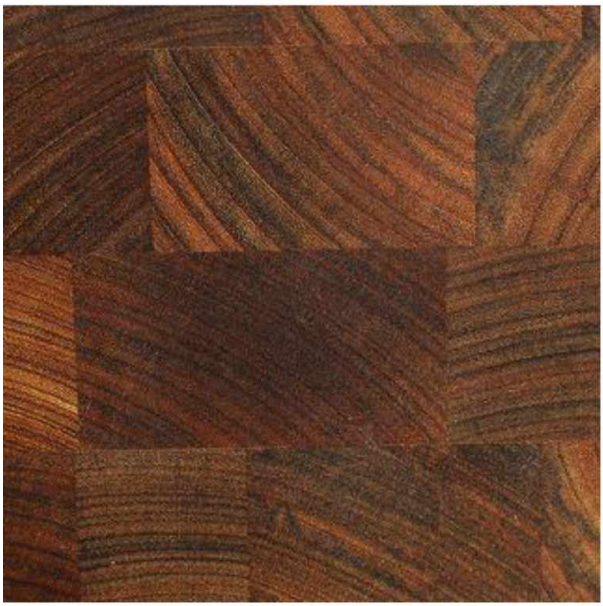
COPPER

Arguably less popular than other countertop materials, but certainly on the rise, copper worktops are truly something special. As Helen Parker, creative director at deVOL Kitchens, says, they "add a certain something that can't be replicated in any other material, a feeling of having something really quite special and practical all in one." Made to oder, they can be pricy, but not as much as natural stone.

BUTCHER BLOCK

Food can be prepped directly on the surface of a butcher-block

counter, which is, to state the obvious, pretty convenient. An occasional oiling is worth it if you love the warm, rustic look. Use a special finish to make the surface more water- and heat-resistant.



WOOD

Or you could opt for classic wood countertops instead. Paul Grothouse of Grothouse Lumber says "wood kills bacteria more quickly than any other surface," which is ideal in a kitchen. Not only do they look timeless and classic in just about every kitchen, but wood surfaces are also pretty easy to maintain when sourced from

good manufacturers with with high quality finishes. Sealing them makes them more durable, though they will show some wear over time. There's a pretty wide variety when it comes to pricing, so it really depends on where you get it.

CONCRETE

For a distinctly industrial look, there's concrete, which can be poured to suit or purchased precast. While obviously durable, concrete stains easily and is not for perfectionists (but a sealant will minimize this!). Cost-wise, it's cheaper than marble but pricier than laminate. You can also use concrete paint on top of laminate to "hack" the look and there are some XXXL ceramic slabs that have a similar look.

QUARTZITE

Not to be confused with quartz, this highly precious and covetable natural stone is similar in look to marble and onyx. Along with granite, quartzite is one of the more heat- and scratch-resistant natural stones. It's often referred to as "engineered quartz" or "engineered stone" in reference to the sealing process applied to the natural stone after it's harvested. Quartzite countertops can be quote porous, so aren't always the best option in high-use areas.

GRANITE

As one of the hardest natural stones, granite can be on the pricier side (though Margles tells us it can be about the same price as a high-quality quartz). This means it's also the most durable, making it great for family kitchens that get a lot of use but still want that element of luxury. It's also one of the most scratch- and heat-resistant natural stones available. Granite will need to be resealed regularly to maintain its longevity. If you're wondering where it comes from, granite is basically the crystalized form of hot liquid magma. Cool!

MARBLE

Marble has pretty much become synonymous with every type of natural stone (or humanmade composite) we see. But it's actually pretty specific. Interestingly, marble is a composite of a variety of minerals, including calcite, graphite, and more. It's one of the softer natural stones, which makes it a little less durable. It's prone to etching ("the first scratch is the deepest," says Otten), but there's no denying the luxe look.

ONYX

Iridescent and translucent, onyx originates in limestone caves and is

formed from water dripping, which creates beautiful, unique veining. You can find it in vibrant shades of pink, green, orange, and more. It's super soft, even more so than marble (but as much as its cousin **calcite**, which sparkles with crystals)—that means it's a little less durable. But with the right sealant, it can become more long-lasting and resistant, though wear and tear should be expected over time. **Travertine** is very similar in makeup, as it also comes from limestone caves and hot springs. Calcite, travertine, and onyx are the only natural stones that can be backlit, which makes their natural glow even more beguiling.

15 Ways You Can Make Your Bedroom More Relaxing

Your bedroom is where you spend time regenerating, resetting, refreshing (really all the positive "re-words"). But while we're social-distancing and, thus, spending more and more time indoors, our rooms can feel less and less like a special sanctuary. Indeed, feelings of claustrophobia and restlessness are likely at an all-time high. But there are definitely little ways to bring the magic back to our personal spaces, and who better to tap than interior designers who are upgrading their bedrooms as they navigate this new stressful lifestyle themselves? I asked Los Angeles-based interior designer Jenn

Feldman (who also happens to be a comforting presence even 3,000 miles away through the phone) and NYC-based decorator Shanti Crawford of Indigo & Ochre Design to learn how we can all update our own bedrooms to enhance rest and relaxation.

"This isn't about major overhauls; I just want to look back and say not only did I survive, but I thrived in the simplest ways that I could to maintain and appreciate the space that you worked so hard to create. We have to be realists about this and just be present and do the littlest things that make your environment feel like it's coming to life in a different way," she reminds us. Ahead, find ten easy ways to upgrade your bedroom for a better oasis. And because shopping for a ton of new things isn't really an option either, we made sure to include things that you can do with what you already have lying around the house.

Tidy Up

First and foremost, you should make sure your bedroom is clean. It's not just better hygienically and aesthetically speaking, but it can also be less stressful. "None of us want be in this situation, but we're in it, so we can at least keep our spaces clean, which can it can make you feel like you're at least in control of your own room," Feldman says.

With a clean, fresh space, there's less to overwhelm your senses. Plus, it'll help you appreciate the things you love about your room and see it's potential again.

Freshen Up the Walls

Whether you feel like embarking on an actual DIY project and repainting the entire bedroom or you just want to touch up your white walls, a little freshening up can go a long way. Check out our favorite bedroom colors and how to decorate around them here, or simply touch up yoru dry wall with a Magic Eraser to get rid of smudges and marks.

Keep Pillow Cases Fresh

This tip is especially helpful for anyone who has allergies. "Even taking off a pillow case and running it in the dryer for ten minutes (or simply letting it air out if you don't have access to laundry machines and spraying it with a fabric refresher) can make it feel more fresh and help reset things a bit," Feldman explains. "Ee' re always cautious about carpets for people who have allergies, too," so you may move a carpet out of your bedroom if you notice waking up with tons of allergies, she says.

Prep Your Bedside Table

Make sure you have everything you'll need before bed and throughout the night within reach so you don't have to get up and interrupt your sleep. Things like a noise machine, charger, carafe of whatever, a eye mask, lip balm, etc.

Get Rid of Clutter

Crawford also points out that decluttering can help you decide which items bring actual value and which do not. "I think rather than more things in the environment we hope to make calming, we're probably better off having fewer but more meaningful things," she says. With that in mind, some good things to to keep in your bedroom could be "a stack of books that we've been meaning to read (or re-read) and now have the time to do so or a framed photograph of people and/or places we love," Crawford suggests. Then donate whatever items you don't need anymore.

Keep Florals Close

"If you have the luxury of getting anything like a flower near your bedside, take advantage of it," Feldman encourages. It may sound simple, but she believes that having a living thing next to the bed can help us "remember the simplicity of being alive."

Wrap Yourself In Something Soft

"Wrap your in something that actually makes your skin feel nice," she suggests. Allowing yourself to have other sensory experiences that help you focus on physical comforts and bring you outside of your head can make such a difference inn your mindset and mood. Feldman tells us she keeps cycling between two cashmere sweaters

she splurged on, and the same can done with soft, comforting throw blankets.

Go Shopping In Your Living Room

"I keep trying to change the scenery," Feldman tells us. And it doesn't have to be anything dramatic. "I walked around my house yesterday and moved my picture frames. The ones in my living room are now in my bedroom. I wanted to be able to look at photos that make me happy, so now that I'm spending more time inn the bedroom, I moved them in there" the designer says. Similarly, you could go "shopping" for new pillows in the family room or living room. It may sound like a small change but reminds us to be realistic about the changes we can actually make. "

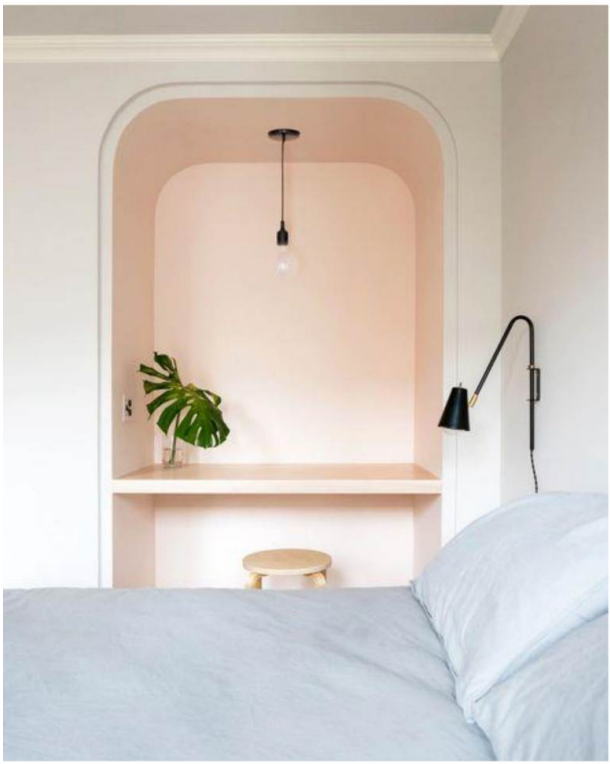
Block Out Light

If you don't have blinds in your bedroom, or you've been having a hard time sleeping in because yours don't keep the light out enough, Feldman says you're probably overthinking it. "This is not a time for perfection, it's a time of getting by. Can you get a sheet out? take the corners of the sheets, take some tape if you don't even have nail. If not, try it with a table cloth, scarf, or pashmina. Get creative with larger fabric items." As long as it can block out more light or create privacy, it'll work.

Separate Your Work Space

If you're bedroom is suddenly moonlighting as a home office, there are a few things you can do to signal the change in use-case as the work day comes to a close. Whether it's dragging in a side table and stool to work to, installing a floating shelf as a little desk, actually getting out of bed will help maintain it as your relaxing sanctuary as opposed to associating it with stress and deadlines.

Ditch Your Devices



"During this incredibly stressful time, I think it is more important than ever to have a place to retreat to from the constant influx of (bad) news and worrisome statistics, so to the extent that we can at least keep laptops and phones elsewhere over night, I think that's not a terrible choice. If that's one habit I can carry over from self-isolation into the future, I'll be delighted…looking for silver linings where I can," Crawford advises.

Swap Out Bulbs

"One of the things that comes up in every conversation is choosing the right light bulb, and whether or not that actually makes a difference," says Feldman. And they definitely. She always chooses LED soft white light bulbs for a gentle glow that's not too bright nor too dark. "I use it in every install, everything we do." Bulb-type aside, she also says lamps are key. "Overhead lighting is is great for tasks or when you're looking for something, but, otherwise, ambient lighting is better."

Light Your Favorite Candles

"Unlocking a few other sensory moments is making me feel like I have a little more balance," the designer shares. Candles are great for stressful times because they can remind us of our favorite places and memories. Lighting one you love before you fall asleep can be very soothing. Just don't forget to blow it out!

Incorporate Earthy Pieces

"Any elements of the earth are powerful right now," Feldman believes. "I don't always know how or why but there's a power there. This can be anything from natural light to living, breathing florals, or any collections stones—even a marble bookend. We remind

ourselves that the earth will be here to find us again, we just have to ride this out. I'm strengthened by the remembrance of those small things."

Make Your Bed

A small thing, sure, but making your bed can really help you begin your day and also feel more relaxed and fresh when you go to bed at the end of the evening. "Because if nothing else, you'll have accomplished at least one thing each day. But especially in this strange groundhog day situation we're all experiencing, making your bed and better yet, climbing into a bed that's been made at the end of the day helps delineate that day and yes, creates structure," Crawford explains.

The Right Window Treatment for Every Room

Ever since I moved apartments three weeks ago, the first thing anyone asks when they see me is "how's the new place?" And lately, my response has been the same: "It's all done—except the window treatments!" That's because, though they serve an important purpose and can often take up some of the most real estate of anything in a room, window treatments can be tough to navigate. There are just so many options—do I go with curtains? Blackout or sheer? Roller shades? Blinds? Dare I say...Roman shades? Plus, given that they can

be an investment piece, you don't want to settle on the wrong one.

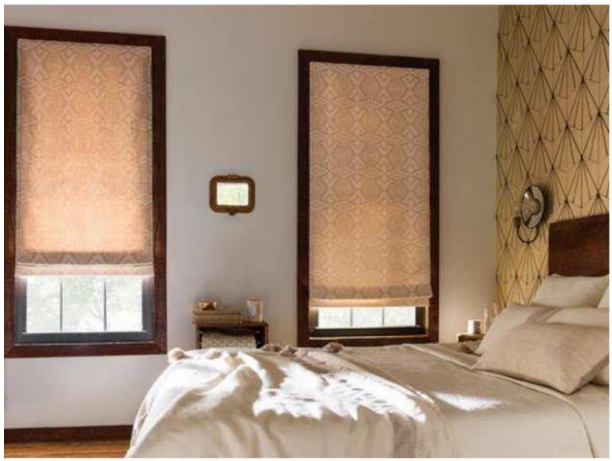
To help you be better informed than I was for your next move (or redesign, renovation, or simple refresh), I tapped the experts at The Shade Store, a designer go-to for window trimmings of all kinds, to give us the rundown. I also asked a few trusted designers how they use them themselves. Read on to hear what they had to say.

Don't put it off

Adam Skalman, The Shade Store's VP of sales, says the biggest mistake people make in the process is procrastinating. "I would encourage everyone to get started choosing window treatments early in the interior decorating process," he advises. "Planning ahead will ultimately make your space feel more carefully curated, with room left in the budget for finishing touches."

Designer Kevin Isbell agrees. "More often times than not we start with the window treatment and work around them, as they do become the focal point," he reveals.

Select your product



Skalman has sold pretty much every type of window treatment under (or , rather, blocking) the sun. The first thing he has to say about any type of treatment: "They should be an investment." And, as part of that, "they should be custom to your space." Instead of snagging the least offensive option from Amazon, take the time to think about how you want light to filter into your space, then work with that.

"I would start with the product type first," Skalman advises (see below for a full rundown of the options). "Once I've decided on the product type, I would move on to materials and patterns."

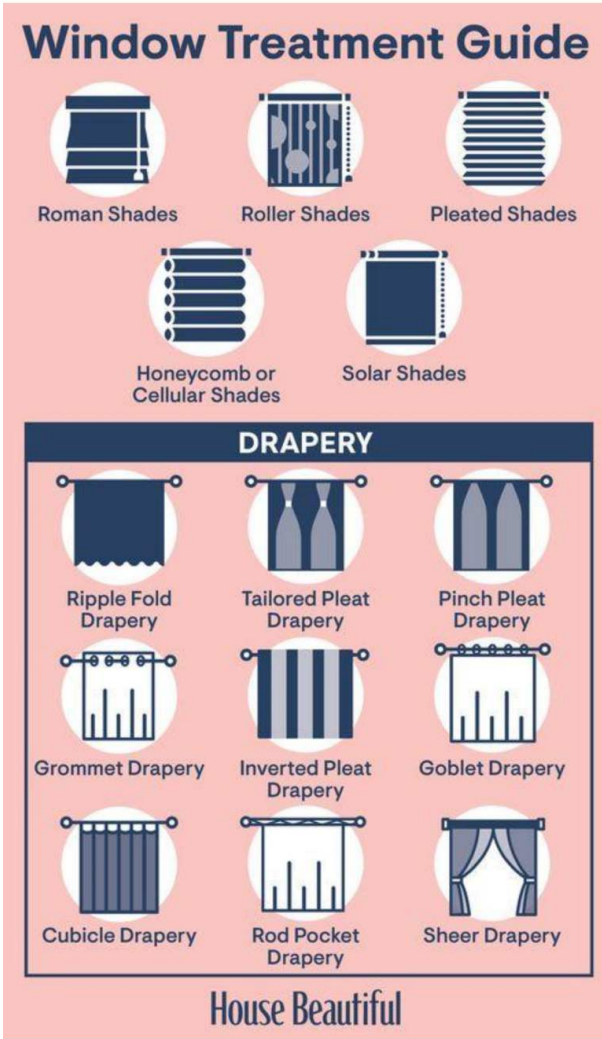
Know your material

It's important to consider what type of material is best for what

application. For example, some sheers may filter light nicely, but they won't hold up to wear in, say, a kids' room. "Knowing how a fabric will drape, whether it will stretch out over time and how it is going to look with different types of light coming through are all important technical aspects that will affect how the window treatment will look once installed," says designer Alizee Brion.

Skalman advises you to work with a professional, like The Shade Store's Design Consultants, to determine what works best. "People try to do it all themselves. I really believe you need professionals to help guide you through the window treatment process, especially with measurement and installation," he says. "You're going to live with your window treatments for a long time, so you should get something that's made very well—and just for you."

Get the right fit



"The custom fit of any window treatment is critical," says Brizon.

Not only does a well-fitted window treatment make a room look polished, it can also improve less than polished rooms. "Properly scaled window treatments can enhance a room and hide a multitude of sins," says designer Kevin Isbell. "Less than desirable ceiling height? Hang the drapery as near to the crown molding as possible so the eye is drawn up. Widows not wide enough? Have the window treatment stack a bit wider on each side so the eye perceives a lager window beyond what is actually shown." Robin Gannon agrees: "We tend to use window treatments to correct a lot of interior architecture," she says.

Master these terms

Finally, we asked Skalman to break down the different types of treatments on the market—what they are, what they do, and how to use them.

Roller Shades "have a minimalist look and feel, and are available in light-filtering and blackout styles to control light and privacy," says Skalman. As you may have guessed, they open and close by rolling over a central dowel, meaning they lay flat when open. "They're a great way to showcase beautiful textures and patterns," Skalman says.

Roman Shades "blend the softness of drapery with the functionality of shades," says Skalman. "There are numerous styles, each crafted to

control light and frame your windows in their own unique way." These shades fold up into themselves to open, usually via a chain pull.

Pleated Shades "are exactly what they sound like — a series of expanding pleats," says Skalman. "They have a crisp, clean look and help to control light and privacy within your space."

Honeycomb, or Cellular Shades "have a clean and simple look similar to pleated," Skalman says. They get their name from the expanding "cells," which look like honeycomb from the side. Not only are they available in light-filtering and blackout options Skalman says, but they

also can help provide insulation.

Solar Shades "are designed with varying transparencies to not only provide light control and privacy, but also to help protect your interior from harmful UV rays and fading," says Skalman.

Blinds are any options that feature "adjustable slats to control light and privacy in your space," says Skalman.

Blackout shades filter all light, perfect for light sleepers who like to drift off in total darkness.

Drapery is an umbrella term for any window treatment that hangs over or alongside the windows. Below are some common types:

Ripple Fold Drapery has no pleat, and instead "features simple, elegant waves that cascade gracefully."

Tailored Pleat Drapery "is a classic design," Skalman says. It's characterized by "repeating sewn folds at the top."

Pinch Pleat Drapery features pleats sewn at just the top, giving fabric the look of being pinched from the end (the image at the top of this story shows an Aerin fabric by The Shade Store in pinch pleat). Designer Betsy Wentz is a fan: "When it comes to window treatments, I like to keep it simple and let the fabric shine," she says. "A full set of drapery panels can literally transform a space."

Grommet Drapery has metal rings within the fabric which the curtain rod runs through.

Inverted Pleat Drapery is "creatively designed to hide top-stitching," Skalman says, giving it a "crisp, clean appearance."

Goblet Drapery is a more ornate style. "If you look closely at the top, you'll see handcrafted pleats that look just like classic goblets," Skalman says.

Cubicle Drapery features small grommets or holes for hooks that hang from a track. "This is a budget-conscious option," says Skalman.

Rod Pocket Drapery features a top "pocket" with openings at both ends for the rod. The curtain fabric spreads across the rod when shut and "gathers beautifully when opened," says Skalman.

Sheer Drapery "is a semi-transparent style that lets soft light filter into your space," Skalman explains. "It looks great alone, but we suggest layering it with solids or patterns for added depth."

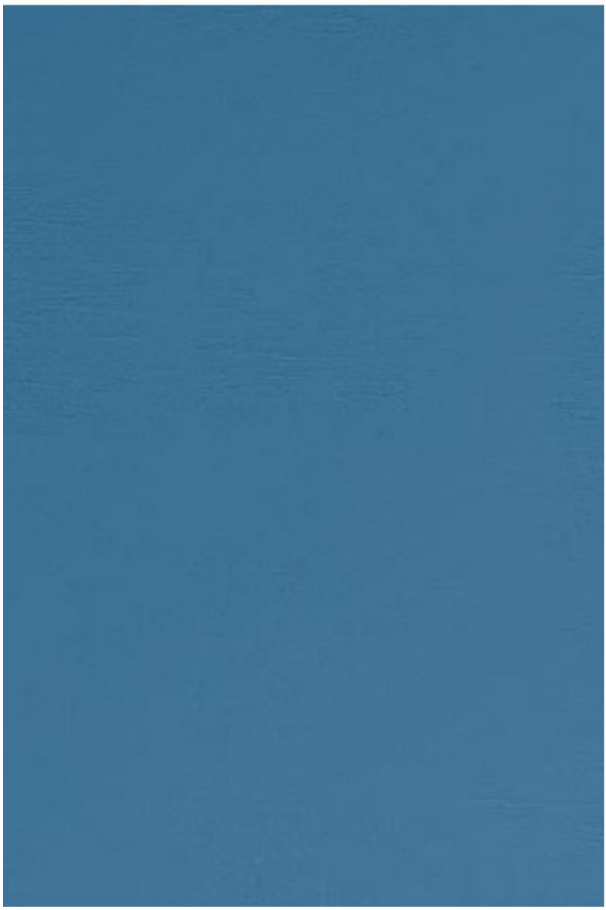
A Paint Expert's Simple Guide to Choosing the Right Paint Finish

If you're new to the whole wide world of paints (and let us assure you, it is indeed a very wide world), you're likely to feel like a kid in a candy store while wandering the color aisle—or like you are drowning in a sea of options. But wait! Color is not the only way to add character to a room, there are also paint finishes. In fact, the same paint color can look completely different based on the finish, from matte to glossy and every sheen in between.

This added layer of possibility means all the more options for finding a perfect paint for your space. To demystify the topic a bit, we asked

Jessica Barr at Behr Paints to break it all down. Read on to learn about the different types of finishes, what they're good for, and how they make a small but transformative difference in the resulting paint color and texture before you start painting your walls. Who knows, you might just surprise yourself with what you pick. As Barr points out, "People often come in looking for one thing and then leave with something else."

Flat



With more pig-ment than any other finish, it's the concealer of paints.

The Look: Non-reflective, a flat finish will soak up light and hide any bumps or scratches in the surface of the wall.

The Lowdown: Flat finishes are the hardest to clean, so don't use them in high-traffic areas. But if it's high-quality paint, you should be able to gently scrub away any imperfections after paint has cured for 30 days.

Best For: Low-traffic rooms with lots of light, like an office or a formal sitting room.

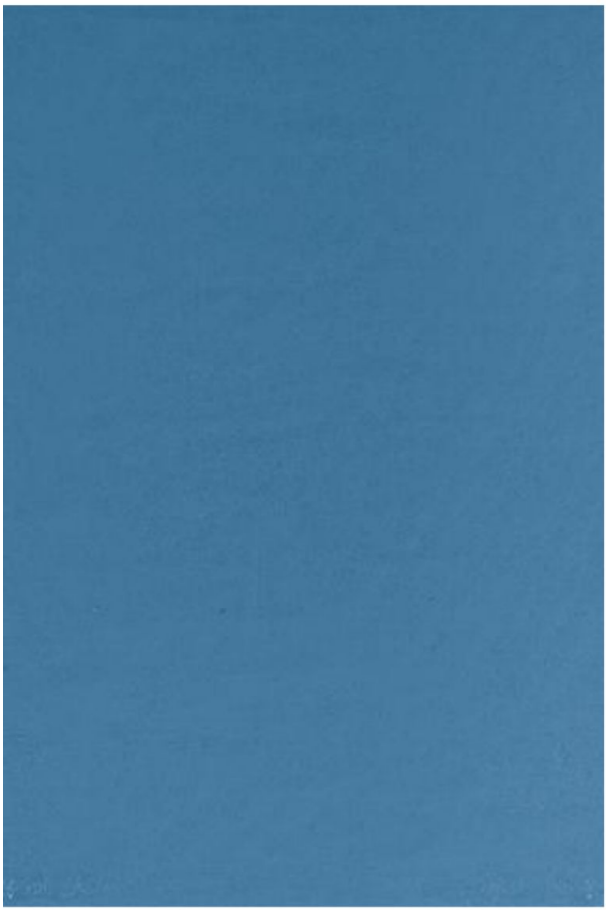
Eggshell

This popular finish is not shiny but not totally matte, and easier to clean than flat.

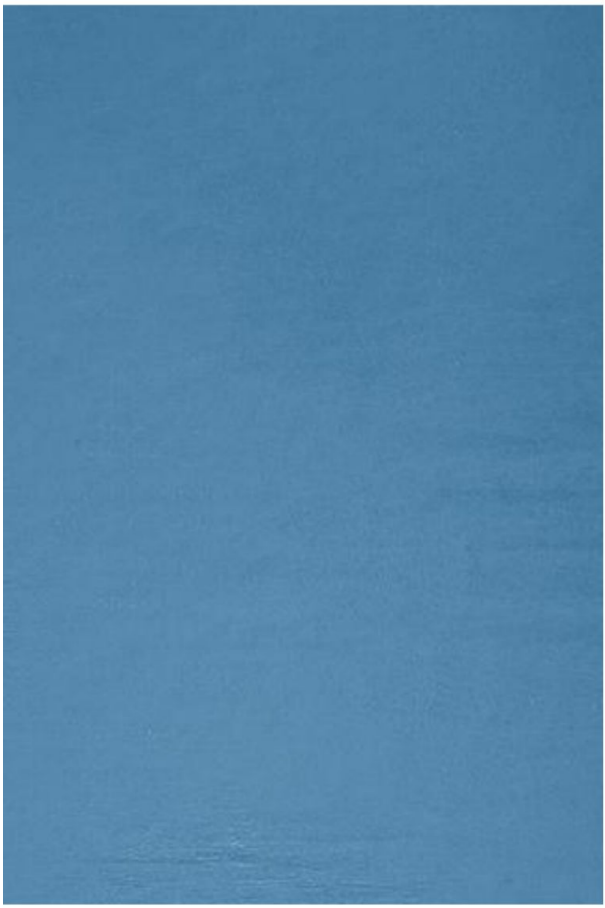
The look: "It's slightly velvety in appearance," says Barr. "When the light hits it, there's the softest glimmer." Think of it as a goes-with-anything glow.

The Lowdown: Though not as tough as semigloss, eggshell hides imperfections better, and it's easier to clean than flat finishes.

Best For: Everyday spaces, like living rooms and bedrooms.



Satin



Perhaps the best all-around player when it comes to durability.

The look: Right in the middle of the sheen spectrum, a satin finish is more light-reflecting than eggshell without appearing as shiny as semigloss.

The Lowdown: Hides imperfections like bumpy walls reasonably well, and it's easy to clean.

Best For: Humid spaces like bathrooms or dark rooms that don't get a lot of natural light, like basements.

Semi-Gloss

Sleek and easy to live with, semi-gloss is a happy middle ground.

The look: Shinier than a satin finish, semi-gloss is known for its radiance. It pairs well with other finishes when used as a an accent, too.

The Lowdown: If you need something durable, and you're OK with shine, semi-gloss is your match. However, due to its heightened sheen, you'll be able to see existing imperfections more easily.

Best For: Great in high-moisture, high-traffic areas, such as kitchens and bathrooms, or on crown moldings and trims to make them pop.

High Gloss

Super light-reflective and statement-making, it's also the most durable.

The look: Most designers would consider high gloss a specialty finish, as it has a glamorous glass-like effect, Barr explains.

The Lowdown: It does show imperfections, but it's also extremely easy to clean. That being said, high gloss is the trickiest to apply. Barr suggests using a quarter-inch roller or a high-density foam roller for smaller spots.

Best For: Accents that you really want to stand out, like furniture, doors, or cabinets.

Super Matte

Matte surfaces can look like velvet: rich and saturated. They're not easy to clean, so beware if you've got a house full of kids. This office nook by 2LG Studio and John Lewis of Hungerford was sprayed with Mylands's FTT-018 in Matte. If you're not sure whether your home would accommodate a matte finish, Barr says to "ask yourself what your expectations are as far as durability and lighting, both from natural and artificial sources. But if you have a low traffic home, you can just think about your decision in terms of shiny or not shiny," Barr advises.

Super Gloss

The rich, liquidy sheen of a lacquer-like finish bounces light around a dark room. Designer Alisa Bloom used Fine Paints of Europe's Delft Blue 4003 in Hollandlac Brilliant to illuminate this bedroom. And remember, "before you make up your mind, take a personal

inventory of your house and be realistic about the condition of your walls, thinking about how a sheen can either highlight or minimize imperfections," Barr advises.

Meet the Flower That Epitomizes California Cool

Nothing captures the beguiling, golden, windblown fantasy that is the Californa dream quite like pampas grass—aside from Joan Didion or Eve Babitz, maybe.

As a California transplant with a black thumb who's bracing myself for the New York winter, this modest little plant has become the most important part of my home. Turns out I'm not the only one stockpiling these low-maintenance, feathery plumes: interior decorators, hip shop-owners, and influencers are flocking to them as well. Keep reading to learn all about pampas grass, then learn how to style this floral that never dies from Corinne Mathern, a Santa Barbara interior designer; Amy Larson of Brooklyn's Shapeless Studio; and Emily Henderson, HGTV host and L.A. designer.

What Pampas Grass Is

Cortaderia selloana, pampas grass' fancier-sounding official moniker, is a tall-stemmed flowering grass native to Southern California. It grows in a variety of neutral colors, from a silvery gray to light beige and golden wheat. Because it seeds prolifically, it's considered an invasive weed in some regions, and is even banned in New Zealand.

A fun, odd fact, according to the Guardian: Pampas grass is associated with swingers in the United Kingdom! Apparently, some folks in the sexy subculture grow it in their front gardens to signal their swinger status to other swingers passing by. It kind of makes sense, seeing as the breezy, free-flowing nature of pampas grass makes it the sexy silk slip dress of the plant world. And though it looks fluffy and soft, it's actually quite prickly to the touch (plus, it sheds, so you're better off not poking and stroking it). Henderson describes it as soft yet sculptural, which is why it brings such an intriguing and unique visual texture to a space.

Why Designers Love It

"Pampas brings a calming texture into the spaces I design—I see it as the floral equivalent of a gorgeous, neutral-colored cashmere blanket," Mathern tells us. "Also, since I am based in Santa Barbara where pampas is abundant, bringing it into the home represents the indoor-outdoor flow of materials that I always strive to achieve with my properties."

Henderson echoes this sentiment, saying that pampas grass "evokes that easy, breezy, carefree feeling that all of us are deep-down trying

to feel… So [we] might as well put it on the outside where we can see it."

Even better news? Pampas grass is eternal. It truly thrives on neglect! No water needed, no sun needed, really no nurturing whatsoever, unlike roses that rot and needy fig trees that cost a fortune. Larson believes that the grass' popularity is due to its ease and versatility. "It brings a natural element to a space, similar to a flower arrangement, but is neutral enough to go with just about any color palette and style," she says. "It provides a soft textural quality that delicate flowers do not. Pampas grass has an agricultural quality that feels especially American, which may be a reason people seem so enticed by it."

Where to Buy It

"Pampas grows wild where I am based in Santa Barbara. So even though it feels like a luxurious floral, it's quite accessible for everyone who is inspired by it," says Mathern. If you're lucky enough, you may be able to source yours from your own backyard, like Mathern does. There I am below, gawking at all the pampas grass growing wild in the Silver Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles this fall.

Otherwise, you can find it at your local flower market. If you're in New York, Larson suggests heading to the flower district on 28th street in Manhattan. And if you're not in those two major cities and

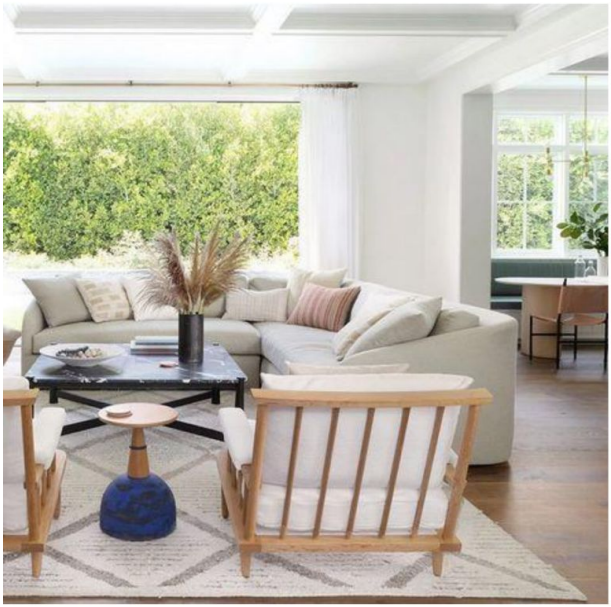
your local flower market scene isn't thriving, "Amazon has a surprisingly decent online selection," she says. My own personal source? I always see pampas grass on display in cool vintage shops and boutiques, so I just ask them if I can buy it off of them (pricier than usual, but it doesn't ever die, so it's a lot cheaper than buying other flowers).

How to Style It

Most designers tend to think that pampas grass looks best on its own. "The reason I love pampas is because of its neutral, earthy color. I don't work with dyed or faux florals. I rarely pair them with other florals," Mathern says.

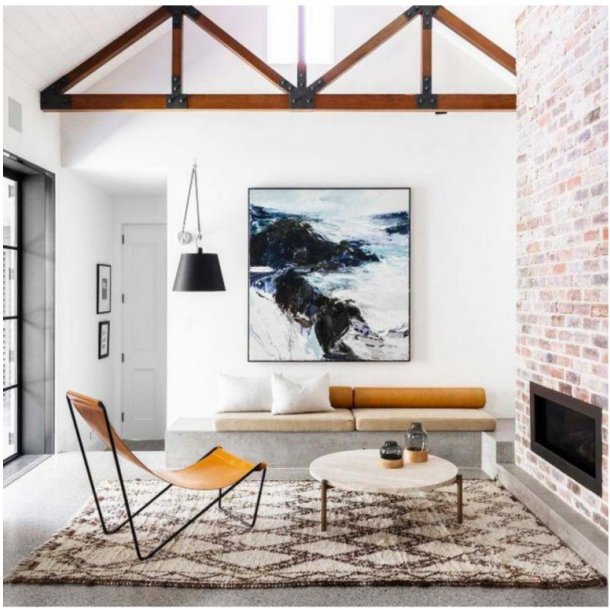
Larson tells us that pampas grass doesn't like or need to sit in water, so if you do decide to mix in some other pieces with it, opt for dried plants, like leaves, twigs, and dried flowers. "Dried herbs are another great option because they give off a nice aroma," she adds.

See How Designers Use Pampas Grass



Best Ceiling Types for Every Home

In a truly well-decorated home, nothing is overlooked—not even the ceilings. Their height, shape, style, and even color can greatly effect the overall mood of space. But we're not just talking wallpaper vs. paint; some of the most incredible ceiling treatments are the result of creative architecture, meaning you should absolutely be considering all the options if you're embarking on a renovation. Read on for a deep dive into the many different ceiling types, including their benefits, characteristics, and tips on how to bring out the best in each option. Learn all about the different types of ceilings below, from sloped to beamed and beyond.



Cove Ceillings

You'll often see cove ceilings in charming little nooks, like under the stairs or in an attic corner—or in this stylish bathroom designed by Tasmin Johnson. Cove ceilings come in many forms and can exist on a larger scale as well: in living rooms, bedrooms, and more. The main idea is that the wall transitions into the ceiling at a wide angle.

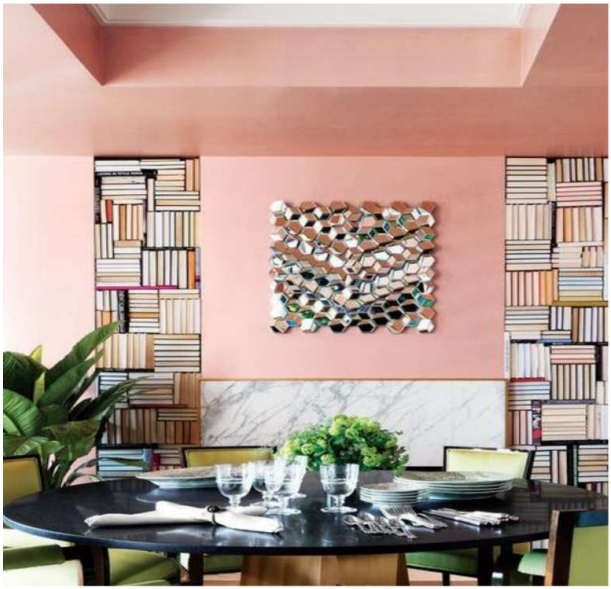
Barrel-Vaulted Ceilings

Broadly speaking, vaulted ceilings are just elevated ceilings. They can have multiple nooks carved out or be a more general sloped A-frame shape. In this space by Commune Design, the ceiling takes on a barreled, curvilinear slope, which opens and softens up the entire room. For an even more elaborate rounded ceiling, consider a full dome.

Cathedral Ceilings

Symmetrical in design, cathedral ceilings are pointed: They have two sides that slope down at the same angle from a central tip. (A-frames are basically cathedral ceilings with sides that go all the way down to the floor as in an attic or cabin.) They're absolutely lovely, and while you couldn't build another floor on top of one, you could create one out of an unused attic space. We love how this kitchen designed by Arent & Pyke plays with a cathedral shape and features exposed beams, too.

Ceiling Trays



Ceiling trays are just recessed ceilings in which the highest point, the center, is inverted. If you have high ceilings, they can give the room more depth and make it feel more spacious. They're simple in design but add a nice finishing touch. You can also do a few layers stacked on top like a Russian doll for a bigger impact.

Coffered Ceiling

The geometric pattern created by a coffered ceiling—which is just like a tray ceiling, only there are multiple recessed areas—is both understated and special, adding just a touch of dimension. They're created by playing with perpendicular beams, or crossbeams, and crown molding.

Speciality Moldings

Elaborate decorative moldings are common in historic homes from the Victorian and Neoclassical periods. But they look beautiful with a variety of design schemes, whether you want to juxtapose tradition with modern elements like in this Parisian apartment designed by Studio Razavi, or keep it classic throughout.

Beamed Ceilings

Ah, beamed ceilings, how we love you! Ceilings with exposed beams just emit so much warmth and character. In this room by Commune Design, they're given a whimsical touch with custom painted designs and are are integrated into a flat ceiling, though they can look just as beautiful in a vaulted one.

Flat Ceilings

The standard flat ceiling can actually be just as beautiful as some of these fancier ceiling types. Keeping it flat is something you probably want to do if you don't have particularly high ceilings, as adding trays and beams can make it feel even lower. As seen in this living room designed by Arent & Pyke, a striking pendant can jazz up a basic ceiling, but you could also go for a high-gloss paint or patterned wallpaper.

How to Choose the Perfect Grout Color for Your Tile

Carrie Waller, founder of the lifestyle and crafting blog Dream Green DIY, has mastered the art of strategic color. Since she started cataloging her projects in 2011, she's used the full spectrum of shades to play up everything from a front door to picture frames. But if there's one often-overlooked place where she'd like to see more hues on display, it's tile grout.

"We forget that grout is just as important as tile choice," she says. "Grout has the unique power to make an otherwise boring tile really pop in a space."

It's possible to experiment with a full kaleidoscope of tiles, and those colors can be used to distinguish other design choices, like texture and shape. Ignoring it is a missed opportunity.

"We end up spending so long trying to choose the 'perfect' tile that all of our energy is spent when it comes time to pick a grout to go with it," she continues. "My advice is to not leave your grout choice to the last minute. Pick it out the same day you choose your tile, because a bad grout choice could end up ruining a good tile choice."

To make this process less intimidating, Waller breaks down what you should know about choosing a high-impact grout color, how to test it out, and the best way to apply it. Follow her lead, and this detail may become your new favorite feature of your bathroom or kitchen.

Thinking About, Testing, and Applying Grout Colors

Pick up a free grout color sheet. If you're spending time at home improvement stores looking at tiles, then you've likely noticed a grout color sheet in the vicinity, too. Those sheets are usually free, and they're worth bringing home with your tile samples.

"The sheets show a true-to-life printed block of color for each grout color option provided by the manufacturer," she says. "Whatever you do, though, don't pick your grout color there in the store aisle. Take

the color sheet home and look at the grout color options in your specific room, so you can choose based on the lighting. Have your tiles handy to lay down next to the grout line printout for a fairly accurate representation of the finished product."

Consider the size of your grout.

Grout color can be used as a way to contrast minimalism or accentuate maximalism. Depending on your personal tastes, it's possible to go as unique or as traditional as you please. For a compromise between extremes, Waller recommends this trick: "Go a shade or two lighter or darker when choosing a grout color for your tile," she says. And when you nail down a color, pay attention to the size of your grout. It will determine how your choice is received.

Be sure to remove enough grout during application.

Before you start installation, take a look at the depth of your tiles: How thick or how thin are they? Their size should hint at how much grout is needed.

"Your instinct might be to leave it thick, but the depth of your tiles should determine how much you end up leaving behind," Waller notes. "Protruding, uneven grout lines are the first sign of an amateur application. To hide your DIY work, just make sure to use a heavy

hand when wiping away excess wet grout from between the tiles. Pass the sponge back and forth across the space between the tiles, and gently but firmly wipe until you see the edges of your tiles show through."